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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 170817779-8161-02]

RIN 0648-XG048

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pollock in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amounts of the Aleut Corporation's and the Community Development Quota pollock directed fishing allowances from the Aleutian Islands subarea to the Bering Sea subarea directed fisheries. These actions are necessary to provide opportunity for harvest of the 2018 total allowable catch of pollock, consistent with the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 28, 2018, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Whitney, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In the Aleutian Islands subarea, the portion of the 2018 pollock total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to the Aleut Corporation's directed fishing allowance (DFA) is 14,700 metric tons (mt) and the Community Development Quota (CDQ) DFA is 1,900 mt as established by the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (83 FR 8369, February 27, 2018) .

As of February 27, 2018, the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined that 12,200 mt of Aleut Corporation's DFA and 1,900 mt of pollock CDQ DFA in the Aleutian Islands subarea will not be harvested. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(4), NMFS reallocates 12,200 mt of Aleut Corporation's DFA and 1,900 mt of pollock CDQ DFA from the Aleutian Islands subarea to the 2018 Bering Sea subarea allocations. The 1,900 mt of pollock CDQ DFA is added to the 2018 Bering Sea CDQ DFA. The remaining 12,200 mt of pollock is apportioned to the AFA Inshore sector (50 percent), AFA catcher/processor sector (40 percent), and the AFA mothership sector (10 percent). The 2018 Bering Sea subarea pollock incidental catch allowance remains at 47,888 mt. As a result, the 2018 harvest specifications for pollock in the Aleutian Islands subarea included in the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (83 FR 8369, February 27, 2018) are revised as follows: 2,500 mt to Aleut Corporation's DFA and 0 mt to CDQ DFA. Furthermore, pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5), Table 4 of the final 2018 and 2019 harvest

specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (83 FR 8369, February 27, 2018) is revised to make 2018 pollock allocations consistent with this reallocation. This reallocation results in adjustments to the 2018 Aleut Corporation and CDQ pollock allocations established at § 679.20(a)(5).

TABLE 4—FINAL 2018 ALLOCATIONS OF POLLOCK TACS TO THE DIRECTED POLLOCK FISHERIES AND TO THE CDQ DIRECTED FISHING ALLOWANCES (DFA)¹

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Area and sector	2018 Allocations	2018 A season ¹		2018 B season ¹
		A season DFA	SCA harvest limit ²	B season DFA
Bering Sea subarea TAC ¹	1,378,441	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	138,334	62,250	38,734	76,084
ICA ¹	47,888	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Bering Sea non-CDQ DFA	1,192,219	536,499	333,821	655,720
AFA Inshore	596,109	268,249	166,911	327,860
AFA Catcher/Processors ³	476,888	214,599	133,529	262,288
Catch by C/Ps	436,352	196,358	n/a	239,994
Catch by CVs ³	40,535	18,241	n/a	22,294
Unlisted C/P Limit ⁴	2,384	1,073	n/a	1,311
AFA Motherships	119,222	53,650	33,382	65,572
Excessive Harvesting Limit ⁵	208,638	n/a	n/a	n/a
Excessive Processing Limit ⁶	357,666	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands subarea ABC	40,788	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands subarea TAC ¹	4,900	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	0	0	n/a	0
ICA	2,400	1,200	n/a	1,200
Aleut Corporation	2,500	2,500	n/a	0
Area harvest limit ⁷	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
541	12,236	n/a	n/a	n/a
542	6,118	n/a	n/a	n/a
543	2,039	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bogoslof District ICA ⁸	450	n/a	n/a	n/a

¹Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A), the Bering Sea subarea pollock, after subtracting the CDQ DFA (10 percent) and the ICA (3.9 percent), is allocated as a DFA as follows: inshore sector - 50 percent, catcher/processor sector (C/P) - 40 percent, and mothership sector - 10 percent. In the Bering Sea subarea, 45 percent of the DFA is allocated to the A season (January 20–June 10) and 55 percent of the DFA is allocated to the B season (June 10–November 1). Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(2)(i) through (iii), the annual Aleutian Islands pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ DFA (10 percent) and second for the ICA (2,400 mt), is allocated to the Aleut Corporation for a pollock directed fishery. In the Aleutian Islands subarea, the A season is allocated up to 40 percent of the ABC, and the B season is allocated the remainder of the pollock directed fishery.

²In the Bering Sea subarea, pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(C), no more than 28 percent of each sector's annual DFA may be taken from the SCA before noon, April 1.

³Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(4), 8.5 percent of the DFA allocated to listed catcher/processers shall be available for harvest only by AFA catcher vessels with catcher/processor sector endorsements delivering to listed catcher/processers, unless there is a C/P sector cooperative contract for the year.

⁴Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(4)(iii), the AFA unlisted catcher/processers are limited to harvesting not more than 0.5 percent of the catcher/processers sector's allocation of pollock.

⁵Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(6), NMFS establishes an excessive harvesting share limit equal to 17.5 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

⁶Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(7), NMFS establishes an excessive processing share limit equal to 30.0 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

⁷Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(6), NMFS establishes harvest limits for pollock in the A season in Area 541 of no more than 30 percent, in Area 542 of no more than 15 percent, and in Area 543 of no more than 5 percent of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC.

⁸Pursuant to § 679.22(a)(7)(i)(B), the Bogoslof District is closed to directed fishing for pollock. The amounts specified are for ICA only and are not apportioned by season or sector.

Note: Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the reallocation of AI pollock. Since the pollock fishery opened January 20, 2018, it is important to immediately inform the industry as to the final Bering Sea subarea pollock allocations. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery; allow the industry to plan for the fishing season and avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet as well as processors; and provide opportunity to harvest increased seasonal pollock allocations while value is optimum. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of February 25, 2018.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: February 28, 2018.

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National Marine Fisheries Service.

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